



**Written Testimony for the Joint Hearing of the Senate Committee on Higher Education and House Committee on Higher Education**

*Interim Hearing – August 19, 2010*

*Charge #6: Evaluate the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*

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**Panel #1: Overview of Structure and Functions of the THECB**

**I. The charge to the Coordinating Board remains unchanged in many ways.**

- a. The Coordinating Board was created by the Texas Legislature in 1965 and “represents the highest authority in the state in matters of public higher education” (Texas Education Code, Sec. 61.051(a))
- b. The Coordinating Board was charged with providing “leadership and coordination for the Texas higher education system” so that Texas may “achieve excellence for college education of its youth through the efficient and effective” use of resources and “elimination of costly duplication in program offerings, faculties, and physical plants.” (Texas Education Code, Sec. 61.002(a))
- c. While higher education in Texas has changed rather dramatically in 45 years, the issues we face are surprisingly similar.
  - i. At the very first meeting of the Board, Governor John Connally laid out a very clear vision of the Board’s role.
  - ii. He warned about an institution “grasping for its own ends without regard to the needs of the people of the whole state.”
  - iii. He cautioned about institutions “striving independently for success;” yet in “danger of mediocrity as a result.”
  - iv. He worried about the proliferation in number and cost of new degree programs and the unchecked expansion of institutions.
  - v. He cheered the significant increases in higher education spending at the time, but stressed that “money standing alone can never be a complete achievement if it is not supplemented by intelligent planning, imagination, careful evaluation, and effective coordination.”
- d. Governor Connally could have given this speech yesterday, and the Coordinating Board’s focus would be no different.

**II. Today, the Coordinating Board is charged with charting an aggressive path to help Texas adapt to a fast-changing economic and educational climate within a global economy.**

- a. The adoption of *Closing the Gaps by 2015* marked an important milestone for the Coordinating Board and the state.
- b. We became one of the first, and remain today one of the few, states to adopt a higher education master plan that outlines very specific milestones.
- c. This plan, and the ongoing support for it from the Governor, Legislature, and our institutions, shows the commitment to higher education that Governor Connally urged forty years ago.
- d. The Coordinating Board has been charged with monitoring and updating the progress of the plan.
- e. But most importantly, we have been charged with identifying policy initiatives and state and national best practices aimed at helping Texas achieve its goals.
- f. The Coordinating Board is uniquely positioned to challenge the status quo and business as usual in higher education—to propose change and improvement when some would consider unnecessary or untimely.
- g. In many ways, the Coordinating Board must be part cheerleader and part prophet—we must encourage and support the progress and work of institutions, but on the other hand constantly challenge them to do better.
- h. It is not always the most popular role.
- i. But it is the role that Governor Connally had hoped the Coordinating Board would fill, and one that must be filled if we are to continue to advance toward the goals of 2015 and beyond.

**III. In fulfilling our mission and role, the Coordinating Board operates under four guiding principles.**

- a. First, the Coordinating Board believes that transparency and openness is critical.
  - i. Transparency is part of the fiduciary responsibility of all state agencies.
  - ii. However, the Coordinating Board believes that transparency and openness about our operations and initiatives can improve policy decisions.
  - iii. Additionally, it helps build consensus which is critical for successfully carrying out meaningful education policy.
  - iv. A recent display of our emphasis on transparency was the development of our Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR).
  - v. After developing our LAR recommendations internally, and before formal approval by the Board, senior agency staff met with key executive and legislative offices, including staff from both higher education committees, to share our recommendations.
  - vi. This exercise in transparency helped the Board further refine its recommendation before submitting to the LBB.

- b. Second, the Coordinating Board has made a concerted effort to reach out to, and work closely with, all stakeholders to include policy makers, institutions, and the broader community.
  - i. Transparency by itself is not enough.
  - ii. The Coordinating Board over the last year has proactively engaged a wide range of stakeholders to discuss proposed policy initiatives.
  - iii. The diversity of stakeholders ranges from the Texas Public Policy Foundation to the Center for Public Policy Priorities.
  - iv. We have engaged groups such as MALDEF, NAACP, and the Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education.
  - v. We are in the process of hosting 7 regional meetings around the state to solicit input from the P-12 sector, higher education, and local community leaders on Coordinating Board initiatives.
  - vi. Senior agency staff have been hosting a series of Listening Tours with key legislative and executive staff, including staff from both higher education committees, to discuss our major initiatives and answer questions.
  - vii. As Commissioner, I am meeting with each Board of Regents in the state; and Chairman Heldenfels and I recently hosted a meeting of the association representing Community College trustees.
  - viii. Members of the Board, I and senior agency staff make every effort to attend meetings, panels, and other venues across the state that include stakeholders interested in higher education to not only explain our initiatives but actively solicit feedback.
  - ix. This active solicitation of stakeholder input has helped the Coordinating Board refine its initiatives and hopefully will result in a fair amount of consensus on key policy.
- c. Third, the Coordinating Board is firmly committed to using data to evaluate and develop effective higher education policy.
  - i. As you will hear in other panels today, the Coordinating Board has a robust accountability system in place that is poised for additional refinements in the coming years.
  - ii. Our approach to policy is simple: use data to identify problems, develop solutions, evaluate implementation, and monitor ongoing progress.
  - iii. One area we are demonstrating this approach is in developmental education.
  - iv. The data show that current practice does not result in desired outcomes for students.
  - v. Last session, the Legislature appropriated \$5 million to the Coordinating Board to launch a competitive grant process to identify programs and institutions willing to seek innovation in this area.
  - vi. The Board will collect data from these programs, determine the relative level of success, and scale statewide as appropriate.

- d. Finally, the Coordinating Board and state's ultimate focus is on students.
  - i. Our investment in higher education, as Governor Connally described, is not itself an end.
  - ii. The Coordinating Board and the institutions throughout this state exist to assure that Texas students have universal access to high quality postsecondary education of all kinds.
  - iii. This access to higher education must be commensurate with the state's diversity and the evolving needs of our workforce.
  - iv. Whenever staff is developing or considering policy, I set a very simple but important threshold: does it make good educational policy to the primary benefit of students.

**IV. As we approach the final stretch of *Closing the Gaps* and begin to prepare for beyond 2015, the Coordinating Board has looked inward to determine whether we are well positioned for the challenges ahead.**

- a. You will hear later from FSG Social Impact Advisors which will outline some of the analysis we conducted in this respect.
- b. But beyond the work of FSG, the Coordinating Board is always looking at ways it can improve its operations and effectiveness.
- c. In response to our analysis, I have implemented a number of internal changes to the way the agency does business.
- d. First, I have recently re-purposed the regular meetings I have with executive officers within the agency.
  - i. These XO meetings (as we call them) have been used in the past as traditional staff meetings—an opportunity to update one another on important issues of the day.
  - ii. While an effective tool, I found that they were not directly aligned with our core mission.
  - iii. Therefore, I am continuing these meetings but with a strategic focus directly on *Closing the Gaps* and our Accelerated Action Plan
  - iv. You will hear FSG refer to this as a “war room.”—however I prefer to call it “Mission Control” where senior agency staff will shine a spotlight on key initiatives in their functional areas and where we can continuously address progress on our key goals.
  - v. This agency must be driven by continuous evaluation and continuous improvement; if we demand this of institutions, we must implement this internally.
- e. Second, in an effort to better address community college issues, we have created a special team of key agency personnel that cross all areas of the agency.
  - i. The purpose of this liaison team is to help the agency more effectively respond to community college issues.

- ii. This will be a critical component for the agency since community colleges represent the greatest growth sector in higher education, and yet will allow us to address these issues in a cost-efficient manner with respect to agency operations.
  - iii. More importantly, it will allow us to fully integrate the community college sector and its issues into agency planning.
  - iv. When I first arrived, I eliminated the community college division within the agency because it was too isolated.
  - v. With this cross-disciplinary team that will include financial aid, academic affairs, and planning and accountability, we can ensure that the community college sector will be handled in a way that will eliminate barriers and differences with its 4-year counterparts.
- f. Third, we have created a special team of key agency personnel to address workforce issues as they relate to higher education.
- i. The Coordinating Board has long worked with the Texas Workforce Commission, representatives from various industries, and more recently with groups such as the Texas Association of Business.
  - ii. However, the coordination has often been limited to individual initiatives or projects.
  - iii. The Coordinating Board recognizes that comprehensive, coordinated and sustained effort aimed at creating a more direct link between postsecondary education and the Texas workforce is more critical now than ever.
  - iv. This agency team will identify strategies to better link higher education and the workforce.
  - v. And, this will help the agency plan higher education policy with workforce needs in mind.